

THE MEDIA AND GHANA'S FORESTS

If this is your first encounter with the Kumasi Wood Cluster, you are probably wondering what this organization represents. You also likely have many questions about Ghana's forests, which you want, answered. As a media person or outlet, you require an information bulletin that offers on-the-go responses to help you to adequately inform and educate your audiences on various subjects. This information brief relates to the forest environment. It offers a snapshot of Ghana's forest resources to heighten your appreciation for them. It also draws attention to what we all can do to safeguard the forest resources. This brief also introduces you to the Kumasi Wood Cluster and its role in Ghana's forest environment.

*Forests require our continuous attention, care and discussion because our lives depend on them. However, we cannot exhaust all forestry issues in this information brief. It is why KWC welcomes periodic engagement with you to jointly discuss, inform and educate the general public on crucial forestry issues in Ghana. If you would like to explore such collaboration further, kindly contact us via e-mail: kumasiwoodcluster@gmail.com or call us on **0322090602**.*

An overview of Ghana's forest resources

The following section presents some intriguing accounts of Ghana's forest resources. We have also attempted to introduce you to some every day terms used in forestry for you to understand them clearly, whenever they are used.

Ghana's forests types

Ghana is broadly divided into two ecological zones: the *high-forest zone* in the southwestern part, accounting for about a third of the total land area with the remaining being the *savanna zone* mostly in the north. In between these zones, there is the *transition zone*.

Records show that Ghana's total forest cover now stands at 1.6 million hectares. Some of these forests are set aside for special purposes and these are generally called *forest reserves*. The term, *on-reserves* is often used for such forests. A significant proportion of forests are found outside the on-reserves and these are also called *off-reserves*. Off-reserves include agricultural lands with considerable amount of trees growing naturally on them.

Some areas receive special protection because of their recognized natural, ecological or cultural significance. These are called *Protected Areas*. Forest protected areas help conserve ecosystems that provide habitat, shelter, food, raw materials, genetic materials and a barrier against disasters. In Ghana, there are about 282 Protected Areas covering a total area of 23,729 km² with 216 of them located within the high forest zone. Two types of Protected Areas exist - *Production reserves* exploited for timber and *Protected forests* established for conservation purposes. Forest and wildlife conservation areas constitute about 16.2 % of the total land area.

Plant and animals species in Ghana's forests

There are about 3,725 higher plants known to be in Ghana. Out of this, about 2,300 are found in the high forest zone, including 730 tree species. Similarly, about 185 of the 222 mammals in Ghana are found in the high forest zone. Birds abound in the country and about 200 of the 494 resident birds are found in the high forest zone alone. Ghana has some 1,185 known species of amphibians, birds, mammals and reptiles according to figures from the World Conservation Monitoring Centre. Of these, 0.8% are endemic, meaning they exist in no other country.

Forests, economy and livelihoods

In terms of economic contribution, forestry and logging accounted for about 3% Gross Domestic Products (GDP) in 2009 and contributed about US\$240.9 million (representing 7.6%) to total export value. According to the Timber Industry Development Division of the Forestry Commission, the primary wood industry (producing poles and billets) accounted for 10.35% of the total export value, while the secondary wood industry (producing lumber, plywood and kindling) accounted for 83.41% of the total export value. The remaining 6.24% of the total export value was contributed to by the tertiary wood industry (producing moldings, dowels, flooring, profile boards and furniture).

It is estimated that about 120,000 people are formally employed by the forest and wildlife sector and about 5,000 to 6,000 people are engaged in regular hunting, with an average income from hunting of around \$1,000 per year.

Many local groups in Ghana are recognized as forest-dependent communities. Forests, particularly off-reserves, are important for commercial timber production, as well as for livelihoods of forest-dependent communities. It is estimated that Ghana's forests serve as a source of livelihood for about 2 million people.

Forests and energy

The primary indigenous energy sources in Ghana are from the forestry sector comprising about 94% wood fuel according to 2006 Strategic National Energy Plan. Biomass in the form of firewood and charcoal dominates the total energy consumed in the country, averaging 67% in 2008.

Some unacceptable forest practices

The accounts above are surely impressive, aren't they? It is the more reason why we all should be interested in forestry issues. However, you need to know this: Statistics show that at the beginning of the last century, Ghana's forest cover stood at about 8.2 million hectares. Today, however, only about 1.6 million hectares are remaining. In 2011, the Food and Agriculture Organization estimated that Ghana's forest cover decreased from 35% to 22% between 1990 and 2010. This figure is frightening, isn't it? Interestingly, most of the causes of forest loss are known to be humans. The following are some examples of practices that contribute to forest loss and are therefore considered unacceptable.

1. Farming in forest reserves without permission from the Forestry Commission
2. Illegally mining in forest reserves
3. Cattle grazing in forest reserves
4. Removing trees in reserved and off-reserved areas without permission
5. Logging in protected areas
6. Felling more trees than permitted
7. Felling under-sized trees
8. Transporting and trading in timber without permission
9. Intentionally setting fire in forests
10. Hunting in forests during closed seasons (August 1 – December 1)
11. Collecting Non Timber Forest Products from forest reserves for commercial purposes without permits from the Forest Services Division of Forestry Commission

What can you do to help protect the forests?

These unacceptable practices have detrimental effects on the economy, environment and livelihoods if not checked. *Even though the Forestry Commission has the primary responsibility toward the conservation, management and regulation of the utilization of forest resources in Ghana, they cannot do it all alone. They need the support of you and other forest stakeholders. If we decisively act together, we will be able to reverse the rapid loss of forests even if we do not live close to them. This way, we can sustainably use forests today and preserve some for future generations. But what can we do? The following are some suggested ways.*

1. Promote and/or support forest education on your medium.
2. Report all illegal forest practices to the Forestry Commission or any of its divisions.
3. Play the watchdog role and check forest corruption and abuses.
4. Support actions/activities that promote sustainable forest management.
5. If possible, use fuels not derived from wood.
6. If possible, use non-wood products to reduce reliance on timber.
7. Avoid setting bush fires unnecessarily.
8. Do not patronize illegal chainsaw lumber. Chainsaw lumber production is banned in Ghana since 1998.
9. Avoid hunting in forests during closed seasons (August 1 – December 1).
10. Try to grow at least one tree in your lifetime.

Role of KWC in Ghana's forest environment

The Kumasi Wood Cluster (KWC) has been operating within the forest environment since 2004. Concerned about the rapid loss of forests and its implications on the environment, economy and livelihoods, KWC supports initiatives that seek to promote sustainable forest management such as forest certification.

Sustainable forest management means the environmentally appropriate, socially beneficial, and economically viable management of forests for present and future generations.

Forest certification is a system for assuring that forest products (such as wood) came from well-managed forests. Clear standards are developed under forest certification. It is understood that when these standards are adhered to, it can inure to the environmental, social, and economic integrity of forests. Convinced about this prospect, the Kumasi Wood Cluster mobilizes and strengthens small and medium forest enterprises (SMFEs) to meet forest certification requirements so that they can enter and remain on the export market. This, KWC, at the moment, does through clustering of three enterprises including Bibiani Logging and Lumber Company Limited, Sunstex Company Limited and Ghana Veneer Processing Company Limited. These enterprises have entered into a partnership arrangement and are being guided by regulations to operate the cluster.

The Kumasi Wood Cluster Association also holds the vision that sustainable and profitable functioning and development of SMFEs shall be guaranteed by effective and efficient utilization of resources available to them. In keeping with this vision, KWC supports efforts that seek to promote the wise use, optimization and development of forest resources. In doing this, KWC uses an integrated approach of building adequate human and organizational capacity, strengthening linkages with relevant forest sector actors and the promoting viable alternative livelihoods for forest dependent communities in particular.

Similarly, KWC expounds programs that aim to reduce illegalities associated with timber harvesting, efficient processing of a varying range of wood products and their associated trading in the responsible manner that would reduce global warming and environmental damage. Moreover, KWC takes interest in strengthening forest communities to demand social justice from duty bearers to ensure that optimised forest benefits accrue to them.

KWC also pursues active partnership with relevant organizations in a concerted effort towards the common goal of promoting responsible forest management and improving the livelihoods of forest dependent people. Our key partners include the National Working Group on Forest Certification, Rural Development and Youth Association (RUDEYA), The Wassa Amenfi Traditional Council, Agribusiness in Sustainable Natural African Plant Products (ASNAPP) and Friends of the Earth, Ghana (FOE).

It is our desire to have you in the media as our dear, instrumental partner as we endeavor to improve our collaboration in the interest of sustainable forest management and environmental protection.

Kindly find time to visit our website: www.kwcghana.org or better still, call us for further discussion on **0322090602**.